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NIGHT SCREAMS

WHO WOULD STEAL THE CORPSE OF A SLAIN STRANGER FROM THE CRUDE GRAVE WHERE IT RESTED? WHAT WEAPON WAS USED TO PUT IT THERE? WHERE WAS THE TRAIL OF DAMNING CLUES? WHY WOULD THE ONLY WITNESS CHOOSE SILENCE RATHER THAN TELL OF THE CRIME THAT A TORTURED MAN REPEATEDLY ADMITTED GUILT TO? THE ONLY LIPS THAT COULD ANSWER SEALED THEMSELVES IN A PLEDGE OF REVENGE!



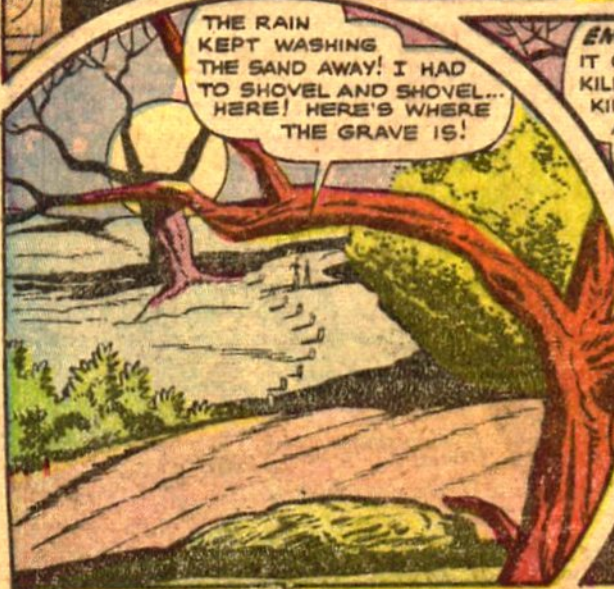
NO SILENCE ENVELOPED THE NEW GRAVE ON SANDY HILL... THERE WAS THE BEAT OF RAIN, THE SCRAPING OF A SPADE IN THE WET SOIL... AND A BLOOD-FREEZING HOWL OF A LONELY DOG BAYING NEARBY...



THAT DOG! WHY DOESN'T HE STOP THAT CURSED HOWLING? I'LL KILL HIM! I'LL KILL HIM, TOO!

O-WWWOO

FRED KANE DID NOT FIND SLEEP THE REST OF THAT STORMY NIGHT, FOR HE WAS HAUNTED BY A TORTURED CONSCIENCE, AND HE FACED A GRIM DECISION, DIFFICULT TO MAKE AND IMPOSSIBLE TO ESCAPE FROM...



SHERIFF WALKER HAD BEEN ATTENDING TO THE LAW FOR MANY YEARS. HE KNEW OTHERS WHO CONFESSED TO CRIMES THEY NEVER COMMITTED... SOME HAD A PURPOSE, MOST WERE SICK IN THEIR HEADS... THIS, HE FEARED, WAS POOR FRED KANE'S TROUBLE. AND THAT WAS OUT OF HIS LINE OF BUSINESS...

COME ALONG, MAN, YOU NEED REST!

NO! I DID IT! I SWEAR! ARREST ME! I'M A MURDERER. AND I'M WILLING TO PAY FOR MY CRIME!

I'VE KNOWN YOU SINCE YOU WERE A BOY, FRED. THERE'S NO BADNESS IN YOU! YOU SHOT A DOG, BUT THAT'S NO HEINOUS CRIME! NOW GO HOME AND GET SOME SLEEP!

YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME! I'LL FIND THE BODY... THEN YOU'LL KNOW!

NO! I WON'T WASTE TIME LOOKING FOR THE BODY! I'VE GOT PROOF! PROOF...AND A WITNESS! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THIS BEFORE?

BONNIE! STRANGE THAT SHE DIDN'T GO TO THE SHERIFF! PERHAPS SHE WANTED TO PROTECT ME! SHE LOVES ME! I KNEW IT!

BUT SHE SHOULDN'T PROTECT ME! I WANT TO PAY! I KILLED A MAN AND I MUST PAY! I'LL EXPLAIN... THEN SHE'LL KNOW HOW I FEEL...

BONNIE! BONNIE, DARLING! OPEN! HURRY! I MUST TALK WITH YOU! BONNIE!

AS LONG
AS HE COULD
REMEMBER
FRED HAD LOVED
BONNIE...
HIS PRESENT
TORTURE
WAS BECAUSE
OF HER, AND
NOW IT
SEEMED THAT
SHE FINALLY
LOVED HIM,
TOO... ELSE
WHY DIDN'T
SHE REPORT
HIS CRIME?
SHE HAD BEEN
A WITNESS
THAT
DREADFUL
NIGHT!

WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT, FRED?

YOU KNOW, BONNIE!
YOU CAN TELL THE
SHERIFF! HE WON'T
BELIEVE ME!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU!
WHAT NIGHT... WHAT STRANGER?
TELL THE SHERIFF WHAT?

DON'T PRETEND,
BONNIE! I'VE
CONFESSED!

FRED KANE, WHAT'S THE
MATTER WITH YOU? I
DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE
TALKING
ABOUT!

YES, YOU DO, BONNIE!
DON'T DEFEND ME!
I'LL PAY FOR WHAT I
DID...

LOOK! I'VE STILL
GOT THESE!
THEY'RE YOUR
UNCLE'S, BUT NOW
THEY'RE MY CLUES!
AND YOU, BONNIE...
YOU'RE MY
WITNESS!

WHAT ARE
YOU TRYING
TO INVENT?

THERE'S MY UNCLE'S SPADE
AND SHACK! I DON'T LIKE GAMES
OF THIS TYPE, FRED, AND I DON'T
INTEND PLAYING THEM. NOW
PLEASE LEAVE!

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT'S THE
MATTER WITH
YOU, BUT YOU'D
BETTER TRY
TO SLEEP
IT OFF!

BUT I KILLED
HIM! YOU KNOW
I KILLED HIM...

NOT FAR DOWN THE COUNTRY LANE, FRED ENCOUNTERED BONNIE'S UNCLE... HE WOULD SEE THE TRUTH... FRED BLURTED OUT HIS STRANGE STORY...

COME WITH ME! I'LL SHOW YOU THE GRAVE!

G-GRAVE! WHAT KIND OF A JOKE IS THIS, FRED?

IT LOOKS LIKE A GRAVE ALL RIGHT, BUT NO ONE'S IN IT! DO YOU TAKE ME FOR A FOOL, FRED?

HEAR MY STORY! IT WAS THE OTHER NIGHT WHEN YOU WERE IN TOWN! I WENT TO VISIT BONNIE, AND...



"...I SAW TWO PEOPLE ON YOUR PORCH. I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE HAVING COMPANY. IT LOOKED LIKE A MAN AND A WOMAN. THEN I THOUGHT I COULD MAKE OUT BONNIE'S VOICE. THEY WERE SITTING SO CLOSE. I COULDN'T IMAGINE BONNIE SITTING LIKE THAT WITH ANOTHER MAN, AND I MOVED CLOSER TO MAKE SURE... THEN I HEARD THEM TALKING..."

I'VE BEEN WAITING SO LONG FOR YOU TO COME, DARLING, AND TAKE ME AWAY FROM THIS AWFUL PLACE... AND THAT IDIOT FRED KANE...

I WALKED ALL THE WAY FROM TOWN TO SHORTEN THE TIME UNTIL I SAW YOU, BONNIE!



I DIDN'T MEET A SOUL. WHAT A LONESOME TOWN. I DON'T BLAME YOU FOR HATING IT!

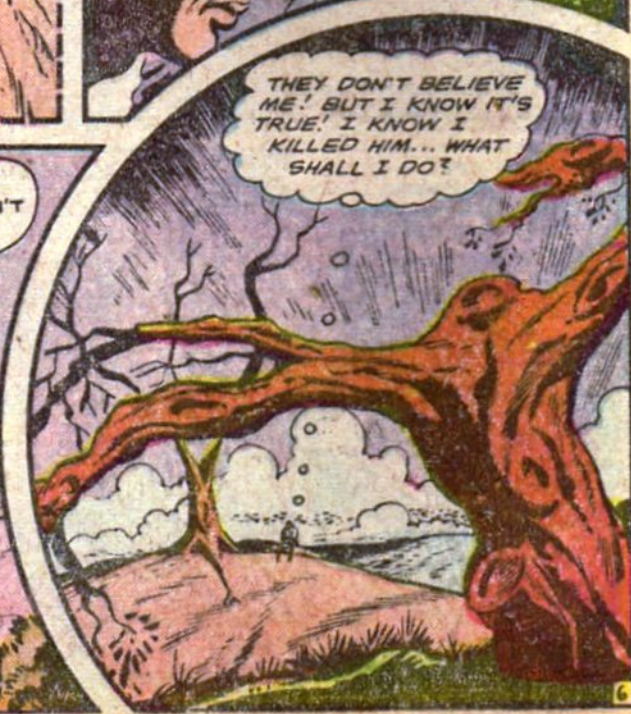
BUT I LOVE YOU!

NO! NO! SHE BELONGS TO ME! SHE'S MY GIRL!



FRED! DON'T! OHHH!





LIFE HAD TURNED INTO A NIGHTMARE FOR FRED KANE, THE REPENTANT KILLER WHO SOUGHT PUNISHMENT, BUT WAS ONLY LASHED BY HIS OWN CONSCIENCE AND DISBELIEVED BY HIS FELLOW MEN...

BONNIE SAW ME! SHE WAS THERE!

I DON'T KNOW WHO HE WAS! BUT I KILLED HIM! I'VE GOT TO BE PUNISHED!

MURDERER! I'VE GOT TO MAKE BONNIE REMEMBER!

I KILLED HIM...

HERE SHE COMES! I'LL MAKE HER GO WITH ME TO THE SHERIFF IF I HAVE TO...

DON'T HIDE, FRED. I KNOW YOU'RE THERE!

YOU'RE COMING WITH ME, BONNIE! TO THE SHERIFF!

LET GO OF ME, YOU FOOL! YOU'RE CRAZY!

I WILL BE CRAZY IF YOU DON'T HELP ME! YOU SAW ME! YOU KNOW I KILLED A MAN!

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF ME! I HATE YOU!

YES, I HATE YOU! I LOVED HIM AND YOU KILLED HIM! OH, I SAW YOU ALL RIGHT, BUT I'LL NEVER ADMIT IT! YOU'LL SUFFER MORE THIS WAY FOR YOUR CRIME, YOU WEAKLING!



TELL THE SHERIFF THAT! TELL HIM, PLEASE, BONNIE!

NEVER! NO ONE WILL KNOW THE TRUTH BUT YOU AND I! THAT IS MY REVENGE!



THE SPADE AND SACK! I'LL BRING THEM TO A LABORATORY! THEY'LL PROVE IT!

YOU DON'T HAVE THEM! I STOLE THEM FROM YOUR CABIN AND REPLACED THEM WITH DUPLICATES! I DIDN'T FORGET A SINGLE THING, FOOL!



YOU'D DO THAT TO ME? OH, NO... NO...

YOU KILLED THE MAN I LOVED! I WILL DESTROY YOU BY MAKING YOU LIVE WITH THE MEMORY OF YOUR CRIME!



YOU THOUGHT I LOVED YOU, BUT ALL THE WHILE I HATED YOU! YOUR SUFFERING IS JUST BEGINNING!

SOMEONE WILL COME LOOKING FOR HIM, THEN THE TRUTH WILL COME OUT!



NO ONE WILL SEEK HIM. HE HAS NO FAMILY. HE CAME FROM NEW YORK TO GET ME AND MARRY ME. BUT HE WAS A STRANGER THERE, TOO! NO ONE WILL LOOK FOR HIM! I TOOK HIS BODY AND HID IT IN ANOTHER GRAVE THAT WILL BE MY SECRET FOREVER!



YOU'LL TELL THIS TO THE SHERIFF, OR I'LL STRANGLE YOU! I CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS!

YOU WON'T KILL ME, FRED KANE, BECAUSE YOU'RE A WEAKLING... AND BECAUSE YOU LOVE ME!

IT'S TRUE! I DO LOVE YOU! THAT'S WHY I KILLED HIM... I KNOW NOW WHAT I MUST DO...

GOODBYE, BONNIE. FORGIVE ME FOR SPOILING YOUR LIFE AND TAKING HIS...

FRED KANE DECIDED HIS OWN FATE... THE SAME PUNISHMENT HE MIGHT WELL HAVE RECEIVED HAD ANYONE BELIEVED HIS PITIFUL CONFESSION...

THERE, IT IS DONE. NOW I WILL PAY FOR THE DREADEFUL DEED I COMMITTED AND FIND PEACE AT LAST!

THINGS WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF I HADN'T BEEN SUCH A FOOL! I HAD DREAMED OF LOVE AND LIFE, BUT NOW...

QUICK! HE JUST KICKED OVER THE CHAIR! BONNIE WAS RIGHT! SHE WARNED ME HE MIGHT TRY THIS! SHE SAVED HIM FROM DEATH!

FRED KANE COULDN'T ESCAPE BY MERE DEATH, BONNIE AND FATE CHOSE ANOTHER WAY TO PUNISH HIM DAY AFTER DAY... AN ASYLUM, WHERE HE COULD TELL HIS TALE AND PLEAD HIS GUILT AND NEVER ONCE BE BELIEVED BY THOSE WHO BOTHERED TO LISTEN...

THERE HE GOES AGAIN, POOR CHAP!

I KILLED HIM! YOU MUST BELIEVE ME! SHE KNOWS SHE SAW ME!

The End

ONE OF US MUST DIE!

WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO LINDA? NOT LONG AGO SHE WAS A HAPPY BRIDE, BUT NOW SHE WAS THE HORROR STRICKEN VICTIM OF A MADNESS THAT NONE COULD EXPLAIN!



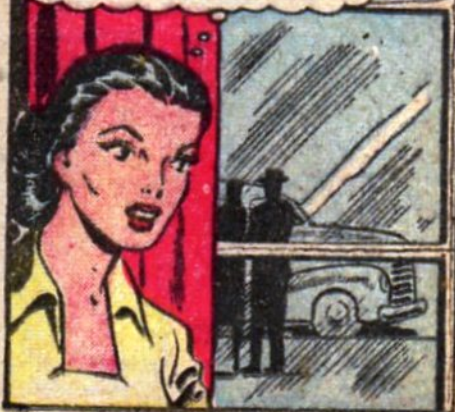
GAIL NELSON HAD BEEN LINDA FAY'S GIRLHOOD CHUM AND NOW SHE WAS HER DOCTOR...SHE LISTENED TO A FRANTIC PLEA WITH COMPASSION AND HOPELESSNESS...

BEFORE I LEAVE, GAIL, YOU'RE CERTAIN YOU CAN'T HELP ME? ANYTHING! HOW LONG CAN I GO ON THIS WAY?

AS I EXPLAINED, LINDA DEAR, YOU MUST HELP YOURSELF! THE CURE IS UP TO YOU! I CAN'T PRESCRIBE MEDICINE TO OVERCOME AN OBSESSION!



SHE'S FORTUNATE TO HAVE ANDY! EACH WEIT LATELY SHOWS HOW RAPIDLY SHE'S FALLING VICTIM TO HER OWN MIND! FOR HIS SAKE I HOPE IT ALL ENDS SOON!



ONCE THE NEIGHBORS WONDERED WHICH OF THE ATTRACTIVE GIRLS ANDY FAY WOULD MARRY, BUT NEVER IN THE YEAR SINCE HE MARRIED GOLDEN-HAIRED LINDA DID ANDY REGRET HIS CHOICE. NOR DID HIS LOVE FALTER. NOW MORE THAN EVER HE REALIZED HOW MUCH HE CARED...

DIDN'T SHE SAY ANYTHING ELSE, DARLING?

NO. JUST THAT I WAS THE SAME. NO CHANGE... FOR THE BETTER...

HOW ABOUT TRYING ANOTHER DOCTOR? NOT THAT I DON'T THINK GAIL KNOWS HER BUSINESS, BUT...

WHAT'S THE USE? AND SHE'S SO UNDERSTANDING...

I STILL THINK IF YOU'D LET ME TAKE YOU OUT FOR AN EVENING LIKE WE USED TO DO, YOU'D FORGET ALL ABOUT IT IN NO TIME!

IMPOSSIBLE. OH, ANDY, DARLING. PLEASE LET ME REST A WHILE. MY HEAD'S POUNDING!

I'M SPOILING HIS FUN... AND SOON I'LL SPOIL HIS LIFE! IF I ONLY KNEW HOW THIS DREADFUL THING STARTED... I MUST TRY TO CONTROL MYSELF... AS GAIL SAID... I MUST FIGHT THIS THING...

BUT HOW CAN I? THERE IT IS AGAIN! OH, HELP ME! PLEASE SOMEONE HELP ME!

I—I DIDN'T MEAN TO CRY OUT! OH, ANDY, WHAT SHALL I DO? IT HAPPENED AGAIN!

GREAT SCOTT, LINDA! YOU FRIGHTENED ME!

TELL ME AGAIN, ANDY!
THERE'S ONLY ONE OF
ME, ISN'T THERE? BUT
THOSE DREADFUL
THINGS I SEE WHEN
MY HEAD ACHES!

THERE'S ONLY ONE,
DARLING! THE SWEET
LITTLE GIRL I MARRIED!
WHY CAN'T I MAKE
YOU BELIEVE THAT?

YOU REST. I'M GOING
TO HAVE A TALK
WITH GAIL MYSELF
AS I SHOULD HAVE
DONE WEEKS AGO!

IT WON'T
DO ANY
GOOD, ANDY
SHE'LL ONLY
TELL YOU
I IMAGINE
IT!

PERHAPS IT'S
BETTER THIS WAY!
LET HIM FIND OUT
THE TRUTH AND
THEN HE'LL
UNDERSTAND!

I'LL BE
RIGHT
BACK...

HOW CAN I FIGHT THIS? I DON'T
EVEN KNOW WHICH ONE OF THOSE
FACES IS ACTUALLY ME! BUT
THIS MUCH I DO KNOW... ONE
OF US MUST DIE...

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU,
GAIL, BUT I'M WORRIED
TO DEATH ABOUT LINDA!
SHE'S SEEING THOSE
VISIONS OF HERSELF
AGAIN, AND...

COME IN,
ANDY! I'VE
BEEN WAITING
FOR YOU TO
FINALLY COME
TO ME!

ANDY
SOUGHT
ADVICE AND
COMFORT,
BUT INSTEAD
HE HEARD THE
SHOCKING
NEWS THAT
LINDA WAS
DRIVING
HERSELF
INTO A
MENTAL
CONDITION
THAT WOULD
BE DIFFICULT
IF NOT
IMPOSSIBLE
TO CURE...

BUT HOW? SHE
WAS SO HAPPY
AND GAY JUST
A SHORT TIME
AGO!

BE BRAVE,
ANDY. I'LL
BE WITH
YOU...

I'D BETTER GET BACK TO HER, GAIL. YOU'VE BEEN WONDERFUL! I GUESS YOU'RE THE BEST FRIEND I EVER HAD...

THANK YOU. ONCE I EXPECTED TO BE MORE THAN JUST A FRIEND, ANDY, BUT FOR NOW, I'LL SETTLE FOR THAT.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE GAVE A SUDDEN TURN WHEN ANDY NOTICED THE ONLY LIGHT ON THE STREET STILL BURNING BELONGED TO HIS NEIGHBOR'S SHOP...

OLD SAM STILL HERE! GUESS I'LL OFFER HIM A LIFT HOME!

COME ON, SAM. I'M GOING PAST YOUR HOUSE... AND I COULD DO WITH SOME COMPANY RIDING ALONG WITH ME TONIGHT!

ANDY! SURE, SON. I WAS JUST GETTING READY TO CLOSE UP. WORRIED ABOUT YOUR WIFE, EH, BOY? TOO BAD...

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MY WIFE, SAM?

I KNOW HER EYES ARE IN PRETTY BAD SHAPE! DOCTOR GAIL HAS ME CHANGING THE LENSES IN LINDA'S GLASSES ALMOST EVERY WEEK LATELY!

GUESS I SHOULDN'T HAVE TOLD YOU, COME TO THINK OF IT!

DON'T STOP, SAM. TELL ME MORE!

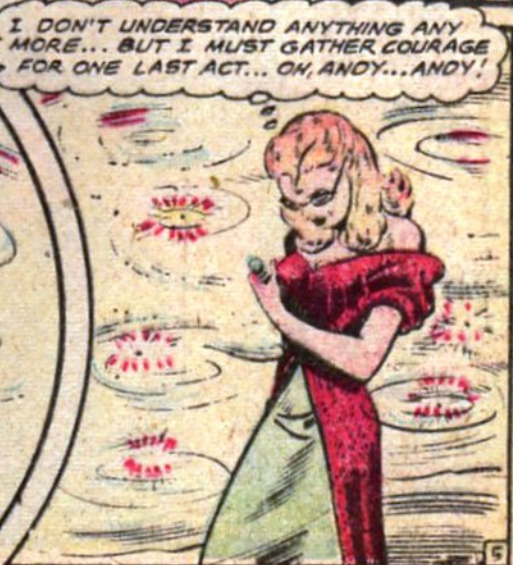
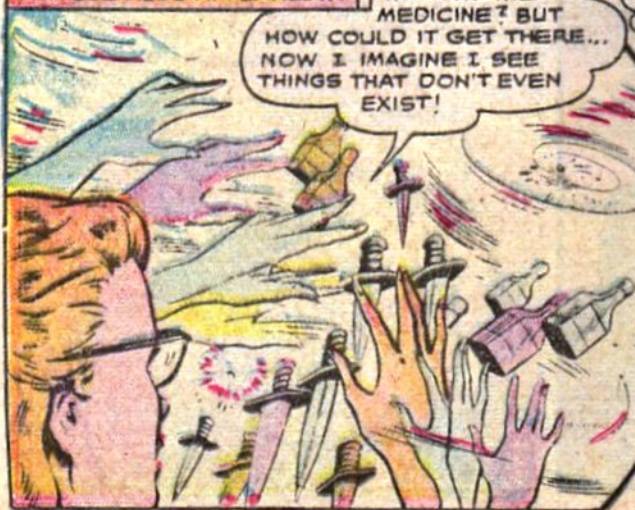
WELL, DOCTOR GAIL IS A FINE WOMAN! SHE TOLD ME NOT TO BILL YOU FOR ALL THE WORK! SHE'S PAYING FOR IT PERSONALLY! NOW I SHOULDN'T HAVE TOLD YOU, ANDY! SHE'LL BE MIGHTY PEEVED WITH ME!



FAR FROM REALIZING SHE WAS THE VICTIM OF A FIENDISH PLOT, DESIGNED BY A WOMAN STEEPED IN JEALOUSY AND DETERMINED TO KNOW REVENGE, LINDA WAS A PERFECT FOIL IN THE PLOT THAT WAS MEANT TO CAUSE HER DEATH...



WITH TREMBLING FINGERS, LINDA OPENED THE PACKAGE CONTAINING THE SEDATIVE... BEFORE HER CONFUSED EYES ANOTHER ARTICLE ALSO APPEARED...



THE WILL TO LIVE BATTLED WITH LINDA'S WISH TO RID ANDY OF THE BURDEN OF HER STRANGE SICKNESS, BUT PERHAPS IT WAS REALLY THE SPIRIT OF LOVE THAT STAYED HER HAND JUST LONG ENOUGH...

LINDA! STOP! DARLING! AND TAKE OFF THOSE GLASSES IMMEDIATELY!

ANDY!



...AND THAT'S THE STORY, LINDA! NOW YOU'VE GOT TO FORGET ALL THAT'S HAPPENED!

... SHE WANTED YOU THAT MUCH!



SHE ALMOST GOT YOU, ANDY! IF YOU HAD BEEN A MINUTE LATER... BUT POOR GAIL, SHE LOST!

I HAVE NO SYMPATHY FOR HER! IT WAS AS EVIL A THING AS A HUMAN COULD DEVISE!



IT MAY SOUND SILLY, ANDY, BUT I FEEL BETTER ALREADY!

ANDY! YOU WERE RIGHT. SHE CONFESSED HER INTENTIONS! SHE WAS TRYING TO DESTROY LINDA!



BUT SHE FAILED! LOVE WAS ON MY SIDE!

IT ALWAYS WAS, SWEETHEART!



The End

CALL OF BLOOD

By JOHN MARTIN

MARSDEN lit an expensive cigar, offered one to Blakes.

"Twenty thousand if you'll steal that Krozna painting for me." He glanced round the luxurious drawing room at the well-lighted pictures that hung on the walls. "I'm no piker, Blakes." He continued. "Trouble is, I like art. Trouble is, good art is expensive. I object to paying the market prices, but I don't mind paying a good operator what he's worth to . . ."

Blakes, tall, saturnine, sardonic, shook his head.

"Anything of Krozna's is out. There's nothing but tragedy connected with his stuff. And this last picture, the one you want, the one the family would never sell . . ." He smiled thinly. "I value my skin. There are rumors about that last painting he did; unclean rumors, Marsden." Blakes shuddered. "It's plain bad luck."

"Surely you're not superstitious?" the millionaire grinned.

"A thief is always superstitious," Blakes rejoined. "He has to be. He *knows* there's more to a thing or a job than the thing itself. I've stolen, Marsden, I'm successful. But I've had failures. And neither men or things caused them. I'm sure of that."

The art collector stared at Blakes, drew deeply on his cigar, sighed: "In this room is the finest collection of art in the world. Only the world doesn't know it. Rare pieces, Blakes, really rare, like that Krozna painting. I've got to have it. Let's say: *fifty thousand.*"

The thief smiled inwardly. He knew his man. The rumors about the painting were real enough. But superstition—faugh! Still, it was a good point to draw Marsden on. He made a show of hesitation. Blakes was more than a thief; in his profession he had often had to be a good actor. Now he permitted the slightest sign of hesitation to cross his features.

Marsden smiled. "*Sixty thousand.*" he said. "I can't go higher than that."

BLAKES studiedly drank his wine. He said nothing for a moment. Then, abruptly, he nodded. "You're a shrewd bargainer, Marsden," he said. "What's more, you're lucky. As it happens, I need money. Alright, I'll do it—for sixty thousand. Half now, the rest when I deliver the painting."

Marsden took out his check book. Hesitating, he put it down.

"How do I know you won't double-cross me, beat it with my thirty thousand?"

"Because I'm in business," Blakes said. "I've never run out on an obligation yet. If I did, do you suppose you'd have called me in?"

The millionaire chuckled, wrote out a check, gave it to Blakes.

The thief rose to go.

"Don't you even want to know where the portrait is, or what it is?" Marsden asked, surprised. "I can tell you, you know."

"I know where it is," Blakes said coolly. "You see, I did exactly what you must have done. I went to see Anton Krozna's surviving brother, Karl, said I wanted to price the picture. It was a blind, of course, though you really did want to buy it. In my profession, Marsden, a man has to keep track of the market, its location, its shape and size."

"A remarkable picture old Anton painted, wasn't it?" Marsden brooded.

Again Blakes shuddered. "You're welcome. I wouldn't hang the thing in *my* house. Not a picture like that. I've seen it. Good night, my friend. See you here tomorrow night with the picture."

"As quickly as all that?" Marsden said, rubbing his hands.

"As quickly as all that." At the door. Blakes, putting his coat on, nodded. "I know all there is to know about that and a dozen other paintings on my list. I'm a good operator—and fast. That's what you're paying for, isn't it?" He closed the door behind him and went out.

At the curb he got into his long, sleek sports car, took the West Side highway out of the city and headed north-east toward the wealthy suburban areas and beyond. The Krozna mansion, he knew, lay outside the small, exclusive village of White Mountain, and was set part-way up the slope. Only old Karl Krozna resided there. He remembered the gloomy halls of the old place, remembered its dark, grim atmosphere, the whole history of Anton Krozna's life. Unsuccessful, at first, bitter, half-starving. Krozna had startled the world with sudden, dizzy success. The ignorant, particularly country folk, attributed it to a pact the artist had made with dark powers. Behind the wheel of his car, Blakes smiled. Success took hard work, talent, luck, as he knew from his own experience. That Krozna was talented, was obvious; he was a hard worker, when he was

alive. Luck, a lucky break had saved him, made him a success. That was all.

SWIFTLY, the car dashed through the village, made for the side road that wound up the mountain. Far up, through the moon-lit night, nestling on the hillside, Blakes could see the old mansion. He stopped the car, turned it round in the road for a quick get-a-way, parked it on the road shoulder and got out. He walked the rest of the way. The wind stirred slightly as he approached the old mansion. It was unlit. Above, the moon sailed serenely on. Blakes thought of his sixty thousand dollars. The gate in the wall that surrounded the old house and its grounds was locked. It took only a moment for the thief to pick its lock. Then, oiling the hinges, he moved it in slowly, noiselessly, about a yard. A moment later he was sprinting across the weedy lawns, toward the terrace, behind which loomed the French windows that opened in on the room where the painting was hung. Once more a lock delayed him, but his long, practiced fingers, aided by clever, almost microscopic instruments he had made himself, cleared the way. Again oiling the hinges, he shoved the door open, stepped inside. A flashlight appeared suddenly in his hand. Its ray crept across the floor to the fireplace, slanted upward. Blakes saw the painting, halted. It had been a shock when he first had seen it. The shock was only a little less, now.

Blakes started forward, stopped, all his senses bared. From somewhere near him he had heard a sound. He walked ahead, stopped. The sound was gone. He laid the flashlight down on a table, still lit, its beam directed toward the fireplace mantelpiece. He picked up a chair, silently, placed it before the fireplace. Blakes lifted one leg, drew it back quickly, as the voice behind him spoke.

"Turn around. I am armed with a gun—and I will not hesitate to use it!"

WHIRLING, Blakes saw old Karl Krozna standing in a doorway, holding a gun aimed at his heart. As Krozna caught sight of his face, he smiled. "So it is you!" the old man said. "Because I would not let you

buy my brother's last painting, you would steal it! I will not let you!"

"Sure of yourself, aren't you?" Blakes said, sparring for time. He glanced at the table, glimpsed a sharp letter opener.

"No one can harm me," Karl Krozna said. He shuffled forward, a bent old figure in his bathrobe. "Who sheds Krozna blood will be killed by Krozna blood. It is a family oath!" He smiled crookedly. "Yes, though I am the last of the Kroznas." He moved toward a phone. "Now I will call the police."

Instantly, Blakes dropped sideways toward the floor. He knew he could not risk exposure. The gun roared, spitting flame in the darkness. With one dexterous movement of his hand as the bullet tore past him, the thief grasped the paper knife, hurled himself at Karl Krozna from a crouching position. The knife blade flashed briefly, came up, buried itself in the old man's throat. With a choking cry he released the gun which clattered to the floor. Then, Blakes' blood froze as the old man laughed. "Blood!" he gurgled from the floor. "Krozna blood calls to Krozna blood!"

Swiftly, a sneer on his face, Blakes turned to the chair. Above him the self-portrait of Anton Krozna loomed, glowing darkly in its grim mixture of reddish browns and red-streaked blacks. Blakes paused suddenly as his eyes lifted to the self-portrait. Then he drew back, his face blanching, his lips muttering formless, hideous words of fear, as, from its frame, the portrait of Anton Krozna wrenched oddly in its frame and climbed down toward him, ape-like, hand-over-hand. Blakes shrank back, gibbering. Now he knew what old Anton had done, secure in his unholy pact with unseen powers. He had painted his last picture, his self-portrait in his own blood. And now, that blood, responding to the call for vengeance from other Krozna blood, was taking human form once more.

Blakes tried to turn, run. Too late. The blood-red hands caught him round the neck, squeezed with inhuman force. They pressed harder and harder until more blood ran. Fresh blood. The blood of a dying thief.

A DEBT TO THE DEVIL!

TRUDY WAS AN ORDINARY GIRL WITH A WORLDLY PROBLEM, BUT THROUGH MOST UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES SHE FELL FOIL TO A DARK PLOT. THIS CONCERNED THE DESTINY OF ANOTHER WOMAN WHOSE FATE WAS IN THE HANDS OF A MASTER PLOTTER WHO WAS GREEDY FOR HER SOUL!

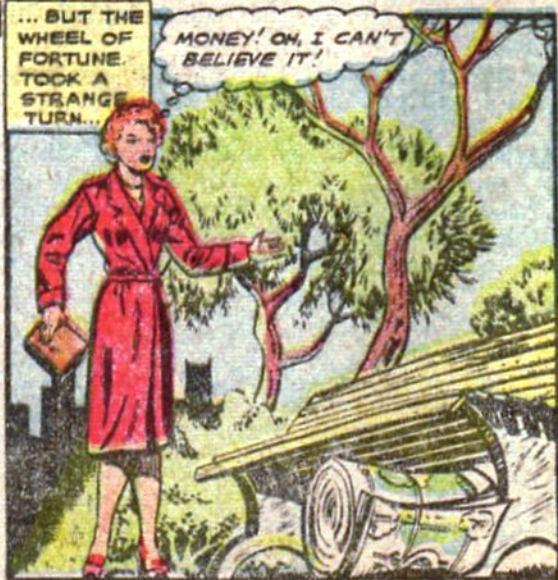


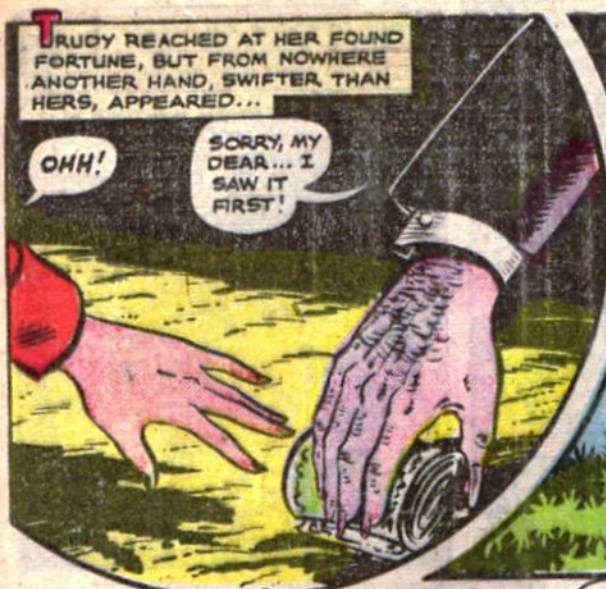
TRUDY GEORGE HAD NO JOB, NO MONEY AND ALL THE TROUBLE THAT GOES WITH SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES... THE MOST PRESSING PROBLEM WAS HER IMPENDING ROOM RENT...



... BUT THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE TOOK A STRANGE TURN...

MONEY! OH, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!





TRUDY REACHED AT HER FOUND FORTUNE, BUT FROM NOWHERE ANOTHER HAND, SWIFTER THAN HERS, APPEARED...

OH!!

SORRY, MY DEAR... I SAW IT FIRST!



I DIDN'T EVEN SEE YOU!

A HEART-BREAKING EXPERIENCE, I'LL AGREE! MUST BE A SMALL FORTUNE HERE!

JUST MY LUCK, I SUPPOSE. THAT'S THE WAY IT'S BEEN RUNNING LATELY...

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT! PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE THIS WITH ME? I'LL MAKE YOU A PROPOSITION!

THERE IS A CERTAIN LADY, A MRS. SMITH, WHOM, I'LL CONFESS, INTERESTS ME GREATLY... HER HUSBAND IS A TROUBLESOME CHAP, THOUGH... NOW IF YOU COULD SORT OF TAKE UP HIS TIME A LITTLE...

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...



BUT IF YOU'RE SUGGESTING THAT I HELP YOU TAKE A WOMAN AWAY FROM HER HUSBAND, THE ANSWER IS DEFINITELY NO!

THE SUAVE-
SPOKEN
STRANGER
WAS SHOCKED
AT TRUDY'S
INTERPRETATION
OF HIS PLAN...
ACTUALLY ALL
HE SUGGESTED
WAS THAT SHE
FIND EMPLOY-
MENT IN HIS
RIVAL'S
PLACE OF
BUSINESS...
THE REST OF
THE SORDID
AFFAIR HE'D
ATTEND TO
PERSONALLY...

I'M JUST TEMPTED TO TELL POOR MR. SMITH WHAT YOU'RE UP TO, Y-YOU HOME-WRECKER!

I DON'T THINK HE'D BELIEVE YOU, MY DEAR. IN ANY EVENT I WOULD STILL REWARD YOU FOR YOUR TROUBLE!



NOT KNOWING EXACTLY WHY SHE FOLLOWED UP THE WILD SCHEME, TRUDY DID TAKE MR. SMITH'S ADDRESS AND THE NEXT DAY APPLIED FOR WORK IN HIS MODEST LAW OFFICE...

I THINK WE'LL GET ALONG FINE, MISS GEORGE. THE JOB IS YOURS AND YOU CAN START TODAY IF YOU WISH!

JUST AS THE MAN IN THE PARK SAID!

THANK YOU, MR. SMITH!



THAT EVENING AS TRUDY WALKED THROUGH THE PARK ON HER WAY HOME...

YOU!

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, MY DEAR. YOU GOT THE JOB, DIDN'T YOU?



MONEY WAS PRESSED INTO TRUDY'S HAND...

NOW, NOW! YOU'VE EARNED IT, TRUDY! AND YOU'LL NEED IT FOR THAT ROOM RENT OF YOURS, TOO! AFTER ALL, IT WAS ALMOST YOURS TO BEGIN WITH! AND THERE'LL BE MORE... AFTER MR. SMITH INVITES YOU OUT TO DINNER...

WHAT SHALL I DO? I NEED THE MONEY SO BADLY... BUT IT'S WRONG... WRONG...

WHY CAN'T YOU LEAVE THIS MRS. SMITH ALONE? DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS WRONG?



ACTUALLY I'M NOT DOING A THING, YOUNG LADY! MRS. SMITH IS DOING IT ALL! SHE IS MOST ANXIOUS TO BE IN MY COMPANY PERMANENTLY!



NOW DON'T YOU BOTHER YOUR HEAD ABOUT HER!

CAN'T FIGURE THIS OUT... WHAT HAVE I TO DO WITH MR. SMITH'S UNRAITHFUL WIFE?



JUST AS THE STRANGER SAID, MR. SMITH DID INVITE TRUDY TO DINNER, BUT IT WAS FOR REASONS OF BUSINESS AND HARDLY PERSONAL...

YOU'VE BEEN WONDERFUL TO SPEND ALL THIS TIME BEYOND YOUR WORKING HOURS, TRUDY. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH I APPRECIATE YOUR INTEREST...

I LIKE MY JOB, MR. SMITH, AND IT'S REALLY BEEN A NICE EVENING, BUT IT'S GETTING LATE NOW AND I'D BETTER GET ALONG HOME...

HE'S SO NICE... HOW COULD HIS WIFE CHEAT ON HIM?

GOOD EVENING, MY DEAR! ENJOY YOUR DINNER?



I KNOW MRS. SMITH DID! OH, SHE WASN'T WITH ME... SHE WAS WITH MR. SMITH'S BEST FRIEND! NOW HERE'S THE MONEY I PROMISED YOU!

NO. I DON'T WANT YOUR MONEY!

AND I DON'T WANT ANY PART OF YOUR EVIL PLANS! IN FACT, I'VE JUST DECIDED TO QUIT MY JOB!

HMMM... WELL, PERHAPS I CAN MANAGE WITHOUT YOU!



BUT THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU'VE DONE SO FAR! YOU'VE HELPED MORE THAN YOU KNOW!

NOW I'VE GOT A NUMBER OF DETAILS TO ATTEND TO! YOU'VE CHANGED MY PLANS A BIT!



TRUDY HADN'T GONE BUT A FEW STEPS, WHEN...

TRUDY! I JUST STOPPED BY THE OFFICE AND SAW THE NOTE YOU LEFT IN YOUR TYPEWRITER!

MR. SMITH! W-WHAT NOTE?

WHY ARE YOU LEAVING YOUR JOB? YOU TOLD ME JUST TONIGHT YOU WERE HAPPY AT THE OFFICE!

I DIDN'T WRITE ANY NOTE!

IT MEANS A LOT TO ME HAVING YOU AROUND, TRUDY! MORE THAN YOU KNOW...

THANK YOU, MR. SMITH, BUT IT'S TRUE THAT I'M QUITTING MY JOB...

FOR WHAT REASON? DON'T I DESERVE SOME SORT OF EXPLANATION?

SO THERE YOU ARE, JOE SMITH! IS THIS YOUR TRYSTING PLACE?

MARILYN! YOU MISUNDERSTAND! THIS IS MISS GEORGE FROM THE OFFICE!

THE LITTLE IDIOT YOU TALK ABOUT ALL THE TIME, EH? WELL, YOU'VE BOTH GIVEN ME A PERFECT SETUP FOR SOMETHING THAT'S BEEN ON MY MIND A LONG TIME!

YOU WOULDN'T GIVE ME MY FREEDOM, SO I'M TAKING IT AT YOUR EXPENSE!

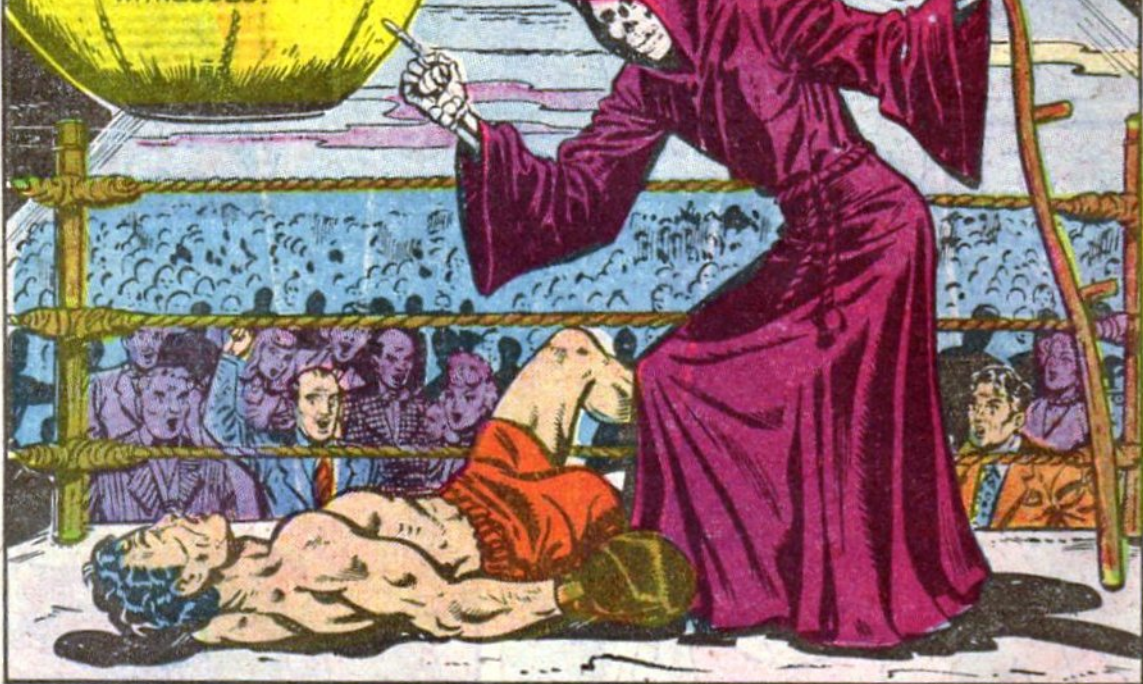
HELP!
HELP!
POLICE!

DON'T MARILYN!
DON'T!



KILLERS' PAYOFF

BIFF BLAKE WAS KNOWN IN THE RING AS THE KID! HIS FORTUNE WAS INSIDE THOSE LEATHER MITTENS, BUT HE KEPT FOULING FATE UNTIL HE HIMSELF DROPPED TO THE CANVAS IN ONE OF THE STRANGEST BOUTS EVER WITNESSED!



THE KID WAS JUST A PRELIMINARY FIGHTER AND HE WAS MOVING FAST, BUT TOO FANCY...

YOU HAVEN'T PAID ME IN A MONTH, BIFF, AND YOU KNOW I HAVE TO KEEP UP WITH SALLY'S HOSPITAL BILL!

YOU'RE BREAKING MY HEART!



AND I OUGHT TO BREAK YOUR JAW FOR INSINUATING THAT I DON'T PAY OFF LOUSY TRAINERS!

DON'T, BIFF...



BIFF AND BILL KING GREW UP TOGETHER AND WHEN BIFF WENT IN FOR FIGHTING, BILL BECAME HIS EFFICIENT TRAINER... WHY, IT WAS ALMOST FIGURED THAT BIFF AND BILL'S SISTER MIGHT MATCH UP ONCE... BEFORE SHE WAS HURT SO BADLY IN A CAR CRASH... BUT ALL THAT SEEMS UNREAL NOW...



N-NO ONE SAW ME! THEY'LL THINK HE FELL! I'D BE A FOOL TO ADMIT I HIT HIM... IT WAS AN ACCIDENT! HE FELL...



BUT THAT NIGHT THE KID DIDN'T DRIFT OFF INTO THE SOUND HEALTHY SLEEP HE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO... THE HAUNTING VISION OF BILL'S DEATH WAS ALL TOO VIVID IN HIS MIND...

CAN'T LET THIS THING GET ME! IT WAS HIS OWN FAULT! I WOULD HAVE PAID HIM...



I'M GLAD YOU FEEL THAT WAY, BIFF, BECAUSE I CAME BACK TO COLLECT ON THAT DEBT! I'LL WANT IT IN PART PAYMENTS, SORT OF A BARGAIN...

B-BILL! I'M DREAMING! IT CAN'T BE YOU! I MUST BE GETTING PUNCHY! GOTTA GET A GRIP ON MYSELF...



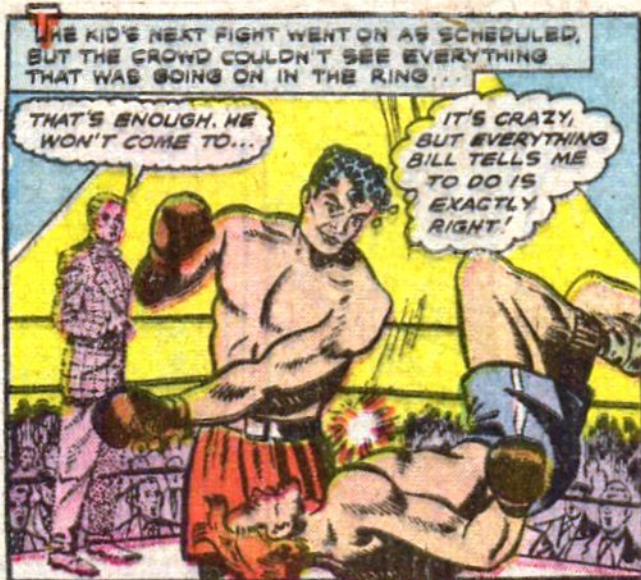
IT'S ME ALL RIGHT, BIFF! AND I STILL WANT WHAT YOU OWE ME! YOU'RE GOING TO SEND EVERY PENNY OF IT TO MY SISTER AND I'M GOING TO SEE THAT YOU WIN PLENTY OF PURSES SO YOU WON'T HAVE ANY EXCUSE NOT TO!

I DON'T GET WHAT YOU'RE DRIVING AT, BILL...



BUT I'LL DO ANYTHING! ANYTHING YOU SAY, BILL!





THE KID'S NEXT FIGHT WENT ON AS SCHEDULED, BUT THE CROWD COULDN'T SEE EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON IN THE RING...

THAT'S ENOUGH. HE WON'T COME TO...

IT'S CRAZY, BUT EVERYTHING BILL TELLS ME TO DO IS EXACTLY RIGHT!

THE WINNAH! KID BLAKE, UP AND COMING HEAVYWEIGHT...

DON'T FORGET THE MONEY...

I'M NOT EVEN WINDED! THAT WAS THE EASIEST FIGHT I EVER WON. WHAT A NICE LITTLE RACKET!

YOU SAW THE SCRAP, BOYS! GIVE HIM A BREAK, HE NEEDS A BREATHER... NO INTERVIEW... SEE US IN THE MORNING!

I'LL GET THIS CHECK OFF TO SALLY. DON'T WANT TO GET BILL SORE AT ME.

YOU'VE GOT A GOOD BOY, PHIL...

ANOTHER MATCH AND ANOTHER VICTORY SOON FOLLOWED. BIFF BLAKE WAS CLIMBING FAST...

THE WINNER... BIFF BLAKE!

SEND THAT CHECK, KID.

TERRIFIC! WHAT'S GOT INTO THE KID? HE'S DYNAMITE!



FROM THEN ON THE ONLY PART OF THE KID THAT TOUCHED THE CANVAS WAS HIS DANCING FEET...

YOU'RE OUT, SONNY BOY!

GOOD! ONE MORE MINUTE AND HE WOULD HAVE HAD YOU!

YOU'VE FINALLY EARNED YOUR WAY TO MAIN EVENTS, KID! YOU'RE GETTING BETTER AND BETTER! TO BE HONEST WITH YOU, I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT!

YEAH...



HERE WAS NO STOPPING BIFF BLAKE... HE WAS MAKING RING HISTORY...

I'M READY FOR ANYONE NOW, PHIL!

I BELIEVE IT! LISTEN TO THE CROWD YELL! THEY LOVE YOU, SON!

PHIL, TAKE A POWDER FOR A COUPLE OF SECONDS, WILL YOU...

S-SURE, KID! GIVE ME A CALL, I'LL BE RIGHT OUTSIDE WITH THE PRESS BOYS...

I WANTED TO SPEAK TO YOU, BILL. YOU AND I ARE THROUGH AS OF TONIGHT! I'M NOT AFRAID OF ANY MAN LIVING AND I'VE DECIDED I'M NOT AFRAID OF GHOSTS ANY MORE, TOO! SO SCRAM!

YOU MEAN NO MORE MONEY TO SALLY?

EXACTLY! WHAT A CHUMP I'VE BEEN! BUT IT'S ALL OVER NOW!

YOU'RE RIGHT, BIFF. SALLY WON'T NEED YOUR MONEY ANY LONGER. SHE DIED THIS MORNING!

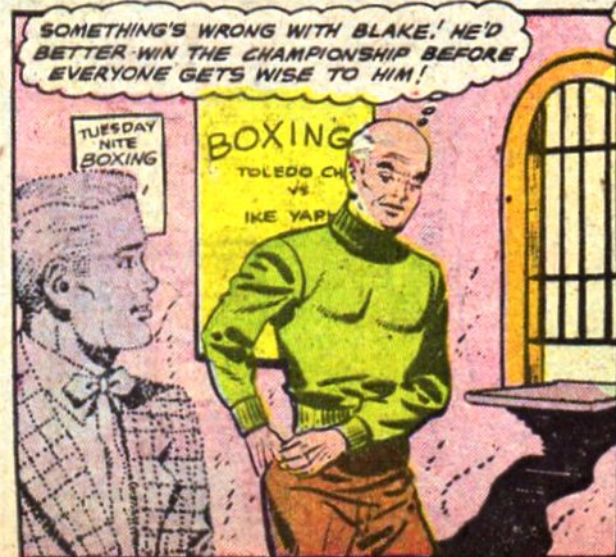
HA-HA-HA! THAT'S RICH! NOW YOU'VE GOT TO GET LOST! DROP DEAD, YOU PHONY GHOST! HA-HA!

YOU STILL OWE ME A BALANCE, KID. WHEN I COLLECT THAT I'M THROUGH WITH YOU! I WANT TWO FRONT ROW SEATS FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP BOUT!

YOU WANT ME TO GET YOU TWO SEATS? YOU'VE JUST GOT KAYOED OUT OF MY LIFE, SPOOK! GET LOST!

I THINK YOU'D BETTER RECONSIDER, KID... I REALLY WANT THOSE SEATS...

HEY, PHIL! YOU CAN COME IN NOW!



AS THE CHAMPIONSHIP BOUT DREW NEAR, BIFF BLAKE FOUND HIMSELF FIGHTING A PRIVATE WAR OF NERVES...

IT'S NOT MY FAULT THEY DIED! THAT'S JUST THE BREAKS THEY GOT!

HELLO, BIFF... I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE I TOOK SACK TWO YEARS AGO!

SALLY!

YOU MURDERED BILL! I DIDN'T KNOW THAT UNTIL I JOINED HIM! WHY... WHY DID YOU DO SUCH A DREADFUL THING?

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, SALLY! AND I TRIED TO MAKE UP FOR IT! I SENT YOU MONEY!

MONEY IN EXCHANGE FOR A LIFE! YOU'VE CERTAINLY CHANGED, BIFF. BILL AND I LOVED YOU ONCE...

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME, SALLY? WHAT?

I WANT YOU TO SAVE YOURSELF, BIFF. WHILE THERE'S TIME... I WILL HELP YOU IF YOU'LL LISTEN...

HELLO, KID, WHAT'S THE IDEA OF SPENDING SO MUCH TIME AWAY FROM THE WORLD, SON?

PHIL! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE MY MANAGER, NOT A BABY SITTER! WHY CAN'T YOU LET ME ALONE?

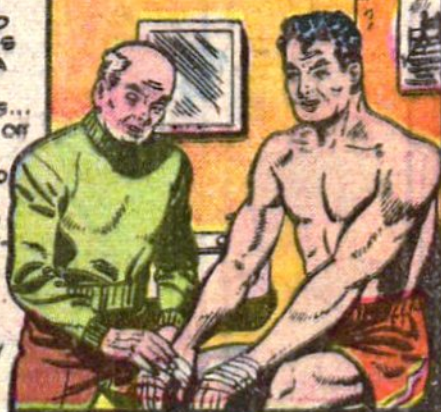
KID!

SALLY! DON'T GO! YOU DIDN'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO! COME BACK, SALLY!

PHIL NOVERED OVER THE KID LIKE A WOTER HEN FROM THAT NIGHT ON... BUT THE FANS AND THE PRESS SENSED A HIDDEN SOMETHING... THE NIGHT OF THE BIG FIGHT FOUND THE ARENA ELECTRIFIED WITH EXCITEMENT, BUT THE DRESSING ROOM ANKWARDLY SILENT...

I COULD HAVE THE DOC GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHECK-UP...

FOR WHAT? I'M OKAY. LET'S GET GOING...



HOW'S IT GONNA GO, KID? ARE YOU THE NEXT CHAMP?

ARE YOU SURE YOU GOT THOSE SEATS FOR ME, PHIL?

SURE, KID! BUT DON'T TALK ABOUT IT NOW, HUH?



YOU SEE, KID, I GOT THEM! THE SEATS ARE EMPTY, AREN'T THEY? JUST LIKE YOU WANTED...

SO I FIGURED RIGHT... YOU AND SALLY! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HELP ME TONIGHT, EH, BILL?



WE CAME TO WATCH YOU DIE, BIFF...

D-DIE! TONIGHT? HERE IN THE RING?



I GET IT! YOU CAME TO WATCH ME GET BEAT!

PSST! PLEASE, KID! EVERYONE'S WATCHING YOU!



WHAT GIVES WITH BLAKE? LOOK AT HIM TALKING TO THOSE TWO EMPTY SEATS! I TELL YOU THE KID IS PUNCHY!

GET OVER IN YOUR CORNER! IF YOU KEEP THIS UP, THEY'LL CALL THE FIGHT!

DIE...



YOU'RE DOING FINE, KID!
JUST TAKE IT EASY! LET
HIM FIND YOU! THEN LET
HIM HAVE IT!

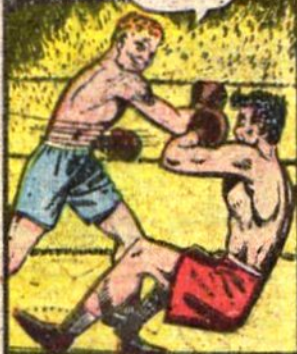


IT'S GOING GREAT! BUT
PLEASE, KID, PAY ATTENTION
TO THE FIGHT! KEEP YOUR
EYES OFF OF THOSE
EMPTY SEATS! IT LEAVES
YOU WIDE OPEN FOR A
HAYMAKER!

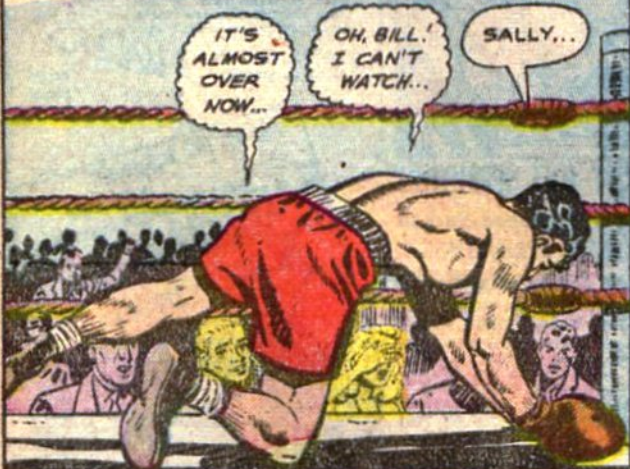


IN ROUND THREE THE
KID WENT DOWN... HE
HADN'T FOUGHT LIKE A
CHAMP, AND NOW HE
SURE DIDN'T LOOK ONE...

THIS MIGHT HELP
YOUR DAY DREAMS,
PAL!



THE KID DIDN'T TRY TO GET UP... HE PAWED
AT THE CANVAS A BIT TRYING TO CRAWL OVER
TO THOSE TWO SEATS...



IT'S
ALMOST
OVER
NOW...

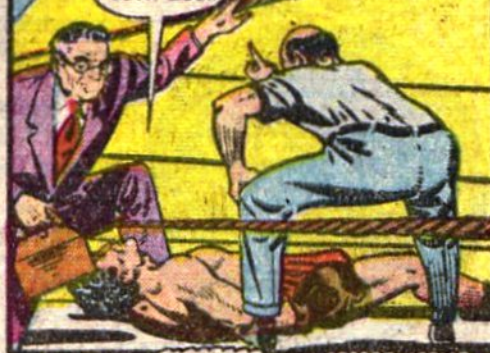
OH, BILL!
I CAN'T
WATCH...

SALLY...

THIS MAN
IS INJURED
TOO BADLY
TO CONTINUE...

... FIVE... SIX...
WHAT'S WRONG
WITH HIM, DOC?
LOOK! HE'S
DYING!

PHIL... I
WANT TO
CONFESS...



BIFF! WHAT
CAN I DO FOR
YOU, SON?
TELL ME...

I MURDERED BILL KING. I'M
SORRY... TELL EVERYONE I'M
SORRY, PHIL. I WASN'T FIT TO
BE A CHAMP... Y- YOU'VE
BEEN GOOD TO ME...



SALLY! W-WILL
YOU FORGIVE
ME? AND BILL...
I KNOW NOW
WHAT A
ROTTER I'VE
BEEN...

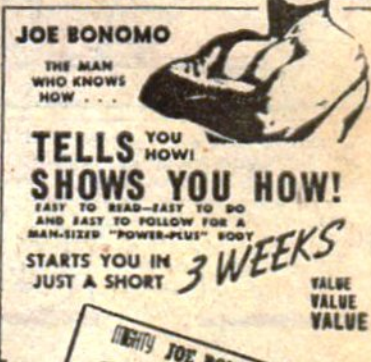
THAT'S ALL
PAST NOW,
BIFF... WE
HOPED YOU
WOULD
HELP
YOURSELF,
AND YOU
DID!

IT'LL GO EASIER
ON YOU NOW, BIFF!
FOLLOW US!
WE'RE ALL
TOGETHER
AGAIN LIKE
WHEN WE
WERE KIDS!



The
End

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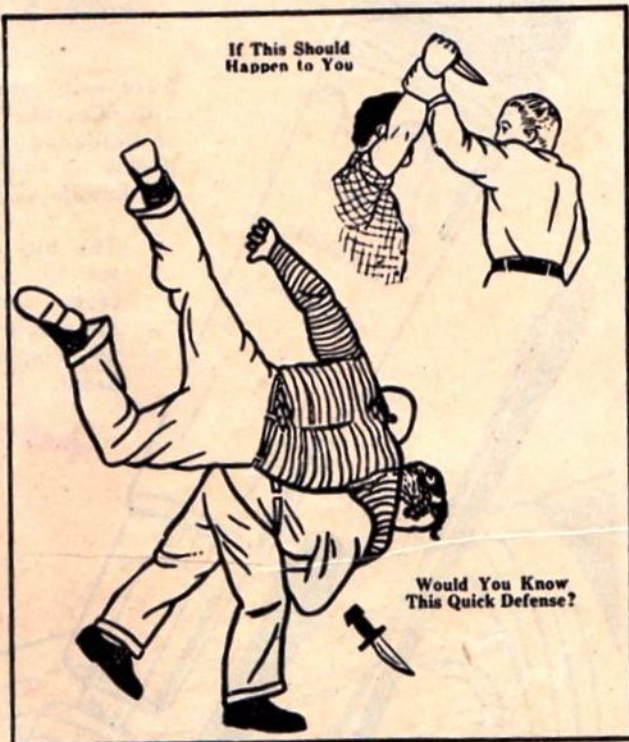
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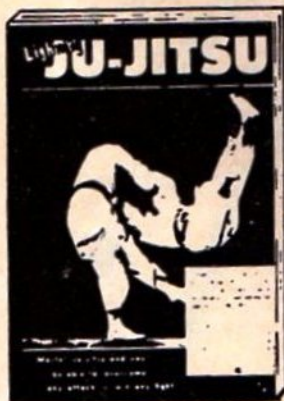
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